

THE ORGANIC FARMING FROM SMALL HOLDER FARMERS

GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

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Nature, Research, Fertility, Greenery, Conservation, Sustainability



Photo: Courtesy of KIOF

1.0: Author's Background

J.T. Muriithi Simba was born in 1942 and completed primary and secondary education in 1960. Worked as accounts clerk in a British firm of Chartered Accountants from 1961 to 1962. Joined Excheque and Audit Department as Audit Assistant from 1963 to 1968. Employed by Agricultural Finance Co-operation in 1969 and retired as a Branch Accountant in 1985. Attained Certificates of Royal Society of Arts in Accounts Commerce and Economics.

- Certificate in Organic Farming from Kenya Institute of Organic Farming (Theory and practice) in 2000 and also certificate in Advanced Intensive Course of organic farming (Theory and practice) in 2001.
- Certificate in facilitation Pro-Poor Value Chain Development and Actor Empowerment course in 2011 by International institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in partnership with KOAN and Pelum Association.
- Certificate of Participation in training of Good Agricultural Practice in Horticulture in 2013 issued by Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya in Conjunction with KEPHIS, PCPB, HCDA and ministry of Agriculture.
- Board member of Kenya Organic Agriculture Network(KOAN) and had been chairman of its sub-committee on Organic Standards and Certification.
- A smallholder organic farmer in Kirinyaga County of Kenya.
- Director of the newly formed Pacesetter Organic Enterprises Ltd.

2.0: Summary

This submission attempts to highlight what the author considers very important and could be in various activities pertaining to smallholder organic farmers. Origin and development of organic farming. Tools and equipments for use could be restructured for better performance. The next aspect involves natural pests and diseases control which has a wider area necessitating further research, some of them are reflected in various publications. Organic fertilizers in use and other inputs sold by commercial entities require analysis by authenticated inspectorate bodies before being released to farmers. IFOAM Organic World Congress could consider introducing fair and reasonable organic standards applicable to all IFOAM membership countries which could be used by smallholder farmers to reach out to designated international markets. It is assumed the upcoming initiatives by African Union will have full support from IFOAM membership.

3.0: Retracing the origin and development in organic farming

Let us put our imagination into play by reflecting on how ecological farming was started. Man in his early stage could have wondered how the Almighty God brought up such an exciting environment with all sorts of living and non-living objects. The developing circumstances induced him to conduct some basic research on how integration of flora and fauna came into being in some sort of harmonious pattern. His research made him realize that he could grow some of the products for various purposes rather than rely on accidental collection of edible fruits and vegetation. He thought through ways and means of constructing rudimentary implements to work on the land and its environment. However, his close observation and study of the environment convinced him that a number of factors had to be considered because they played an important role in sustainability of his farming endeavors. These were that while clearing land was necessary, it caused environmental imbalance resulting into depletion of soil fertility and thus making future plant or crop growth problematical. Sustainable farming practice necessitated devising methods and practices which could restore the lost soil fertility. His initial research culminated in shift -cultivation and later in advanced special ideas resulting in crop rotation, composting, making natural crop protection sprays and organic fertilizers.

4.0: Facilitative Tools and Equipments

The narration in the above paragraph makes it clear that the original approach to farming was casual and slow in assessing and devising the development of a special farming process. The lessons previously learned through observation and trial facilitated improvement in organic farming practice. Farming tools were developed and innovative ideas on faster and better approaches on ecological farming introduced. However, the fundamental of sustainability requires that we continue encouraging further research on better, simplified methods in the application of organic farming process. Tools and equipments in use are crucial in agriculture and I was particularly impressed that George McRobie started with a selection from the previous book "Tools for Agriculture", which targeted small scale farmers before coming-up with the current book "Tools for Organic Farming" published by the Intermediate Technology Publication Dept.

Affordability, convenience, simplicity and efficiency in tools and equipments used go a long way in maintaining acceptance of farming by small holder farmers and particularly sustainable organic farming practice. The laborious nature of composting, for example, had been one of the causes of fall-out of quite a number of aspiring organic farmers. From personal level, there are times that I have been attempting to modify some of the tools listed in the "Tools for Organic Farming" with the assistance of our "Jua Kali" metal artisans. I have also

been thinking on whether grass-cutter and hand propelled cultivation machines listed in the same book, could be improved to have a sturdy engine capacity and appropriate accessories for use in compost-turning process.

5.0: Natural Pest and Diseases Control Aspects

Organic farming emphasizes the need for integrated holistic system of farming to maintain as far as possible, the natural eco-system balancing effect. That is why it is mostly recommended we minimize the use of external inputs with the expectation of enhancing a self-sustaining farming process in organic farms. It is like saying that food production could be carried out while at the same time maintaining environmental status quo. However there are times some control measures of pests and diseases have to be there in case of need when the induced environmental balancing effect is ineffective to a greater extent in controlling the damage to crops. “Natural Pests and Diseases Control” book by Henry Elwell and Anita Mass which is published by Natural Farming Network-Zimbabwe and that of Gabriele Stoll with a title “Natural Crop Protection in the Tropics” which is distributed by Margrat Verlag became handy to any aspiring organic farmer. For the farmers who could access internet website, I find the following one very useful on a wider scale. www.lfonet-biovision.org. The updating of information in that website is pursued satisfactorily for the benefit of passing the latest information to the interested parties. It is noteworthy, that the two books referred above have recommendations reflecting the need for further research in quite a number of cases. Such recommendations should form the basis of further research for natural remedies rather than synthetic chemical solutions. In Kenya, the long established chemical companies are introducing what they claim to be organic input products. There is no doubt this is due to customers increasing demand for organic products. If they could match the expected integrity in ensuring compliance with stringent organic endorsement requirements, they would be serving a special class of organic farmers who would rather rely on ready made organic inputs in part of their farming process.

We could also assume these companies would be interested to follow-up the unaccomplished research in the specific areas mentioned in the above two books, or from other sources. However, organic farmers should be wary that most of these companies have compromising secrecy cum profit interest in their undertakings which could be incompatible with farmer’s expectations. It is also possible that external inputs introduced in the market are highly priced and thereby putting off most of the small-holder organic farmers. I have been approached by the representatives of one of the companies which is introducing organic inputs products to our markets and I proposed to them that they look into the undeveloped areas of research pertaining to plants known to have some insecticidal effects. However, I find some of their products which are already in the market prohibitive in price which could discourage easier access to the majority of small scale farmers. It is hoped that as more companies join the lucrative demand for organic products, prices would stabilize to a much more affordable level.

6.0: Organic Fertilizers and other plant strengthening supplements.

The soil amendment fertilizers and other supplementary plant strengthening organic preparations have been mentioned briefly, and in some cases in detail, in the “Natural Crop Protection in the Tropics” book referred above. The essential point in the book is that the combination of compost or organic fertilizers as well as supplements should be to strengthen the plant for a better and higher yield output and enable plant or crop to acquire resistance to attacks from pests and diseases. The referred companies are also introducing organic fertilizers and plant/ crop boosting organic products. Due to the already mentioned compromising interest, I would rather recommend that a thorough analysis of their products be made to ascertain the veracity of their

claims before endorsement of approval for what could later be unprecedented proliferation of organic products. I would also advise organic farmers to consult the referred website www.infonet-biovision.org for more information on organic fertilizers and other plant strengthening supplementary preparations and the effective cultural practices applicable.

7.0: Proposal for introduction of IFOAM International Organic Standards

- i. IFOAM could move from giving international Organic Standard Guidelines to more practical aspects by getting all or most of the participating country-representatives and IFOAM members at this forum to introduce an agreed process of formulating a mutually acceptable international Organic Standards applicable in the participating countries.
- ii. The proposed and eventually accepted International Organic Standards could aim to be neither too high nor too low at its compliance requirement expectation of world-wide small holder organic farmers who are currently the majority producers. A middle ground consensus could be agreed upon by the participant countries.
- iii. The participating countries approved and licensed organic certification bodies could be entrusted to oversee the application of the finally accepted International Organic Standards in their countries.
- iv. To the majority of smallholder organic farmers compliance would open up various international markets to them. This would also widen consumer choices of products available at designated markets. It would enhance organic products trade among participating countries to their mutual benefit and generate additional rate of growth of their economy.

8.0: Contemporary Promising Developments

On 3rd April 2014, Kenya Organic stakeholders met at ICIPE for the launch of Kenya National Organic Agriculture Platform under the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative. This initiative was developed at a meeting of African Heads of State in 2010. The aim was to improve agricultural productivity food security access to markets and sustainable developments in Africa. For a start implementation is directed to 8 African countries under the chairmanship of the Africa union Commission. The general six dimensions are;-

- Research Training and Extension.
- Information and Communication.
- Value Chain and Market Development.
- Networking and Partnership.
- Policy and Programme Development.
- Institutional Capacity Development.

That ICIPE meeting facilitated election of various persons and institutions for the National Platform Committee (NPC) County Lead organizations (CLO) and Pillar Implementing Partners (PIPs). I have been informed that those elected to various committees had their first meeting recently. We have much hope that with the support of IFOAM and this forum participating countries, we shall soon feel and see the aura of major improvement in the Kenya organic sector.

References

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2. (a) *Jill Donisthorpe, John Wanjau Njoroge, Farming for health- 25p, 1993- Kenya Institute of Organic Farming*
(b) *Field Notes on Organic Farming- 70p.(1994) by John Wanjau Njoroge*
3. *The Organic Business Guide-p155 (Developing sustainable Value Chain with smallholders) – IFOAM (2010)by Bo Van Elzakker& Frank Eyhorn*
4. *Natural Crop Protection in the Tropics by Gabrielle Stoll (2nd Edition, Distributed by Margaret Verlag*
5. *Tools of Organic Farming p77 Intermediate Technology Publications (1990) by George McRobie*
6. *National Pest and Disease Control, Natural Farming Network- Zimbabwe by Henry Elwell & Anita Maas.*